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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001246

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/02/2014

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SUBJECT: KISANGANI TENSE AS POPULATION FEARS SPREAD OF
CONFLICT TO THEIR REGION

Classified By: Poloff Gons Nachman for Reasons 1.5 B and D

1. (C) Summary. Kisangani is currently tense as population remains concerned about possible Rwandan aggression through dissident RCD-G officer Laurent Nkunda. A large presence by various GDRC military components has also added to this tension and could increase the potential for problems, especially if the supplies of food, etc. currently being supplied by Kinshasa should cease. End Summary.

Strong GDRC Military Presence in Kisangani

2. (C) Poloff spoke with NGO sources during a June 30 visit to Kisangani. They said that although many soldiers had transited through Kisangani on their way to Bukavu over the past three weeks, close to 7,000 of them remained in Kisangani. This figure includes:

- FARDC's Integrated Brigade: 3,500
- GSSP (Presidential Guard): 1,500-2,000
- Former RCD-G's 7th brigade: 1,000-1,500
- Mai-Mai (loyal to Padiri): 1,000

3. (C) Well-armed GSSP soldiers have created a roadblock outside of the Kisangani airport where they search all non-MONUC vehicles. They also have a strong presence in the airport itself, guarding access to terminals and tarmac areas. This has created some tension with civilian authorities and travelers.

4. (C) According to NGOs, FARDC's newly trained integrated brigade remains in Kisangani waiting for a yet to be determined deployment. Although this brigade was initially conceived as a peacekeeping-support initiative to assist MONUC in Ituri, FARDC officials are reported to be discussing instead the possible use of this brigade as a new "Kivus Brigade". NGOs also note that this brigade is currently receiving little if any support from the GDRC and that soldiers do not have enough food to eat. (Comment: Sending this brigade to the Kivus could pose a serious problem as these soldiers lack basic combat training and may receive little if any logistical support from the GDRC. End Comment.)

Population Fears Nkunda and Rwandan Intentions

5. (C) Congolese human rights workers said that there was considerable fear among the population about Rwanda's intentions towards the DRC. Many people see dissident RCD-G officer Laurent Nkunda as a front for Rwanda's efforts to control the East in order to pursue economic exploitation.

6. (C) A confrontation between members of General Padiri's 9th and General Obed's 8th military regions on June 17th was seen by people in Kisangani as an effort by Obed to stop the advance of Padiri's forces into Walikale. Mai Mai forces loyal to Padiri had also engaged in a confrontation with soldiers from the 8th military region days before that in the same area of Walikale. Sources in Kisangani said that they expect further confrontations as FARDC forces from Kisangani will attempt to confront Nkunda in the near future. Indeed, Padiri recently traveled to Lubutu-Walikale to mobilize government forces in the area for future operations.

Growing anti-Rwandan and Some Anti-American Sentiment

7. (C) Congolese NGO workers in Kisangani said that people were trying to boycott Rwandan-owned businesses such as a telecom company and various supermarkets due to growing anger and frustration with their perceived aggression towards the DRC. The RCD-G's reputation has also suffered as a consequence of RCD-G dissident's Nkunda and Mutebusi's actions in Bukavu. Although the RCD-G was not popular in Kisangani prior to the latest round of problems in Bukavu, it did have some limited support. Now the RCD-G is widely viewed as an unpatriotic entity largely controlled by Rwanda. Nonetheless, people are also giving the benefit of the doubt to newly appointed RCD-G Governor Theo Baruti, mainly because he was appointed by the national government and because he has tried to reassure the population with a professional and diplomatic approach.

18. (C) Atanas Zafiropulos, who runs the Hellenic Club Restaurant in Kisangani (Note: One of only three remaining Greek nationals from a community that once had over 1,500 members. End Note.) said that he had heard anti-American comments during demonstrations against MONUC earlier in June. He noted that USAID's office had been specifically targeted and that Congolese blamed the US for not pressuring Rwanda to stop its aggression. Various Congolese also said that the US and Great Britain had the influence to control Rwanda, but had refused to do so. Some actually suggested that Anglophone South African UN peacekeepers had sympathies for Rwanda and had purposely refused to confront them in the Kivus.

Comment

19. (C) Kisangani will continue to experience tension as long as the Nkunda situation remains unresolved. However, a poorly coordinated effort by ill-equipped and poorly trained government soldiers could also prove disastrous. Growing militarization of the area will also increase the potential for conflict between armed groups and the population. Reports that soldiers from FARDC's newly integrated brigade in Kisangani are not being paid and do not have food to eat are also of concern as this increases the likelihood that they will prey on civilians for their sustenance.
HOOKS